

*Senate Foreign Relations
Hearings File*

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Shielding Foreign Policy

Wherever the responsibility lies for the fact that the Senate foreign policy hearings are being conducted in executive session, the Foreign Relations Committee has missed a great opportunity to dramatize important issues to the public. There is very little reason, according to some who have been present, why most or all of the testimony of Administration officials so far could not have been given in open session.

It is said that the Committee chairman, Senator Green, merely arranged the hearings in accordance with precedents and that he in no way refused to let members vote on whether to open them to the public. Other Democratic members reply that Mr. Green's opposition to open hearings was well known and that they did not raise the issue in order to avoid a fight in the Committee.

This is a pretty flimsy explanation, and it scarcely excuses those who have given lip service to the idea of a broad public discussion of foreign policy for failing to press the point in the Committee. It does little good for Senators to grumble about the Dulles record if they are unwilling to be counted. The practical result of the closed hearings is to shield the Administration from criticism at least in public, and to blunt the effect of any legitimate objections which members may raise.

Nor is the security argument a valid one. Most of the presentations to date apparently have been pretty pallid and would have caused few ripples in the Kremlin. But if there was justifiable reason for closing some sessions or parts of sessions, it certainly was not necessary to throw a veil over the entire series. In point of fact, it would have been easy to issue transcripts of the testimony, in the fashion of the MacArthur hearings, with discussions that touched on security edited out.

Altogether, we think it is an unimpressive performance which belies the advance billing by those who proclaimed their wish for a wholesale review of Administration policy. Insofar as objections to this policy are well grounded, indeed, the type of proceeding chosen affords a singularly poor way in which to register them effectively. Furthermore, there is an enormous public interest in the acquisition of adequate information for sound judgments—and the present procedure completely ignores the importance of furnishing the raw material for enlightened public opinion.

The challenge is the greater if the Committee is to continue, as evidently is to be the case, under a 91-year-old chairman who can hardly be expected to have the alertness and vigor of some of the younger members. What are these members doing to furnish the leadership the lack of which in the Administration they so often bemoan?